

Senate Bill 83

By: Senators Mullis of the 53rd, Miller of the 49th, Dugan of the 30th, Albers of the 56th, Gooch of the 51st and others

A BILL TO BE ENTITLED

AN ACT

1 To amend Part 2 of Article 6 of Chapter 2 of Title 20 of the Official Code of Georgia
2 Annotated, relating to competencies and core curriculum relative to quality basic education,
3 so as to revise provisions relating to elective courses in History and Literature of the Old and
4 New Testament Eras; to provide for related matters; to repeal conflicting laws; and for other
5 purposes.

6 BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF GEORGIA:

7 **SECTION 1.**

8 Part 2 of Article 6 of Chapter 2 of Title 20 of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated,
9 relating to competencies and core curriculum relative to quality basic education, is amended
10 by revising Code Section 20-2-148, relating to elective courses in History and Literature of
11 the Old and New Testament Eras, as follows:

12 "20-2-148.

13 (a)(1) All public schools with grade nine or above may make available to eligible students
14 in grades nine through 12 an elective course in:

15 (A) In the History and Literature of the Old Testament Era ~~and an elective course in;~~
16 (B) In the History and Literature of the New Testament Era;
17 (C) On the Hebrew Scriptures, Old Testament of the Bible;
18 (D) On the New Testament of the Bible; and
19 (E) On the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament of the Bible.

20 (2) The purpose of such courses shall be to ~~accommodate the rights and desires of those~~
21 ~~teachers and students who wish to teach and study the Old and New Testaments and to~~
22 ~~familiarize students with the contents of the Old and New Testaments, the history~~
23 ~~recorded by the Old and New Testaments, the literary style and structure of the Old and~~
24 ~~New Testaments, the customs and cultures of the peoples and societies recorded in the~~
25 ~~Old and New Testaments, and the influence of the Old and New Testaments upon law,~~
26 ~~history, government, literature, art, music, customs, morals, values, and culture;~~

27 (A) Teach students knowledge of biblical content, characters, poetry, and narratives
28 that are prerequisites to understanding contemporary society and culture, including
29 literature, art, music, mores, oratory, and public policy; and

30 (B) Familiarize students with, as applicable:

31 (i) The contents of the Hebrew Scriptures or New Testament;

32 (ii) The history of the Hebrew Scriptures or New Testament;

33 (iii) The literary style and structure of the Hebrew Scriptures or New Testament; and

34 (iv) The influence of the Hebrew Scriptures or New Testament on law, history,
35 government, literature, art, music, customs, morals, values, and culture.

36 (3) A student shall not be required to use a specific translation as the sole text of the
37 Hebrew Scriptures or New Testament.

38 (b)(1) ~~No later than February 1, 2007, the~~ The State Board of Education shall adopt a
39 curriculum for each course, including objectives, reading materials, and lesson plans,
40 which has been prepared in accordance with the requirements of this subsection.

41 (2) The book or collection of books commonly known as the Old Testament shall be the
42 basic text for the course in the History and Literature of the Old Testament Era, and the
43 book or collection of books commonly known as the New Testament shall be the basic
44 text for the course in the History and Literature of the New Testament Era. In addition,
45 students may be assigned a range of reading materials for the courses, including
46 selections from secular historical and cultural works and selections from other religious
47 and cultural traditions. The courses shall familiarize students with the customs and
48 cultures of the times and places referred to in the Old and New Testaments. The courses
49 shall familiarize the students with the methods and tools of writing at the times the Old
50 and New Testament books were written, the means by which they were preserved, the
51 languages in which they were written and into which they were translated, and the
52 historical and cultural events which led to the translation of the Old and New Testaments
53 into the English language. The local board of education may recommend which version
54 of the Old or New Testament may be used in the course; provided, however, that the
55 teacher of the course shall not be required to adopt that recommendation but may use the
56 recommended version or another version. No student shall be required to use one version
57 as the sole text of the Old or New Testament. If a student desires to use as the basic text
58 a different version of the Old or New Testament from that chosen by the local board of
59 education or teacher, he or she shall be permitted to do so.

60 (3) The courses provided for in this Code section shall:

61 (A) Be taught in an objective and nondevotional manner with no attempt made to
62 indoctrinate students as to either the truth or falsity of the biblical materials or texts
63 from other religious or cultural traditions;

64 (B) Not include teaching of religious doctrine or sectarian interpretation of the Bible
65 or of texts from other religious or cultural traditions; and

66 (C) Not disparage or encourage a commitment to a set of religious beliefs.

67 (c) The provisions of this chapter relating to personnel employed by local units of
68 administration, including without limitation certification requirements, employment, and
69 supervision, shall apply to persons who teach the courses provided for in this Code section.

70 In addition, no person shall be assigned to teach such courses based in whole or in part on
71 any religious test, profession of faith or lack thereof, prior or present religious affiliation
72 or lack of affiliation, or criteria involving particular beliefs or lack thereof about the Bible.
73 Except for these requirements, the qualifications and training of teachers shall be
74 determined by the local boards of education.

75 (d) On and after July 1, 2007, for the purpose of earning Carnegie unit curriculum credits
76 at the high school level, satisfactory completion of ~~the course in the History and Literature~~
77 ~~of the Old Testament Era shall be accepted by the State Board of Education for one-half~~
78 ~~unit of elective credit, and satisfactory completion of the course in the History and~~
79 ~~Literature of the New Testament Era any of the courses described in subsection (a) of this~~
80 ~~Code section shall be accepted by the State Board of Education for one-half unit of elective~~
81 credit; provided, however, that such courses are taught in strict compliance with the
82 requirements of this Code section.

83 (e) A local board of education may make such arrangements for monitoring the content
84 and teaching of ~~the course in the History and Literature of the Old Testament Era and the~~
85 ~~course in the History and Literature of the New Testament Era any of the courses described~~
86 ~~in subsection (a) of this Code section~~ as it deems appropriate.

87 (f) Nothing in this Code section shall be construed to limit the authority of a local board
88 of education to offer courses regarding the Old Testament or the New Testament that are
89 not in compliance with this Code section; provided, however, that no state funds distributed
90 pursuant to this article shall be expended in connection with such a course that does not
91 meet the requirements of this Code section.

92 (g) Nothing in this Code section shall be construed to prohibit local boards of education
93 from offering elective courses based upon the books of other religions or societies. In
94 determining whether to offer such courses, the local board may consider various factors,
95 including, but not limited to, student and parent demand for such courses and the impact
96 such books have had upon history and culture.

97 (h) A course offered under this Code section shall follow applicable law and all federal
98 and state guidelines in maintaining religious neutrality and accommodating the diverse
99 religious views, traditions, and perspectives of students in the school. A course under this
100 Code section shall not endorse, favor, or promote, or disfavor or show hostility toward, any

101 particular religion or nonreligious faith or religious perspective. The State Board of
102 Education, in complying with this Code section, shall not violate any provision of the
103 United States Constitution or federal law, the Georgia Constitution or any state law, or any
104 administrative regulations of the United States Department of Education or the Georgia
105 Department of Education."

106

SECTION 2.

107 All laws and parts of laws in conflict with this Act are repealed.